

**The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University**  
**Ohio State Engineer**

**Title:** Silhouettes

**Creators:** Fanning, Ralph

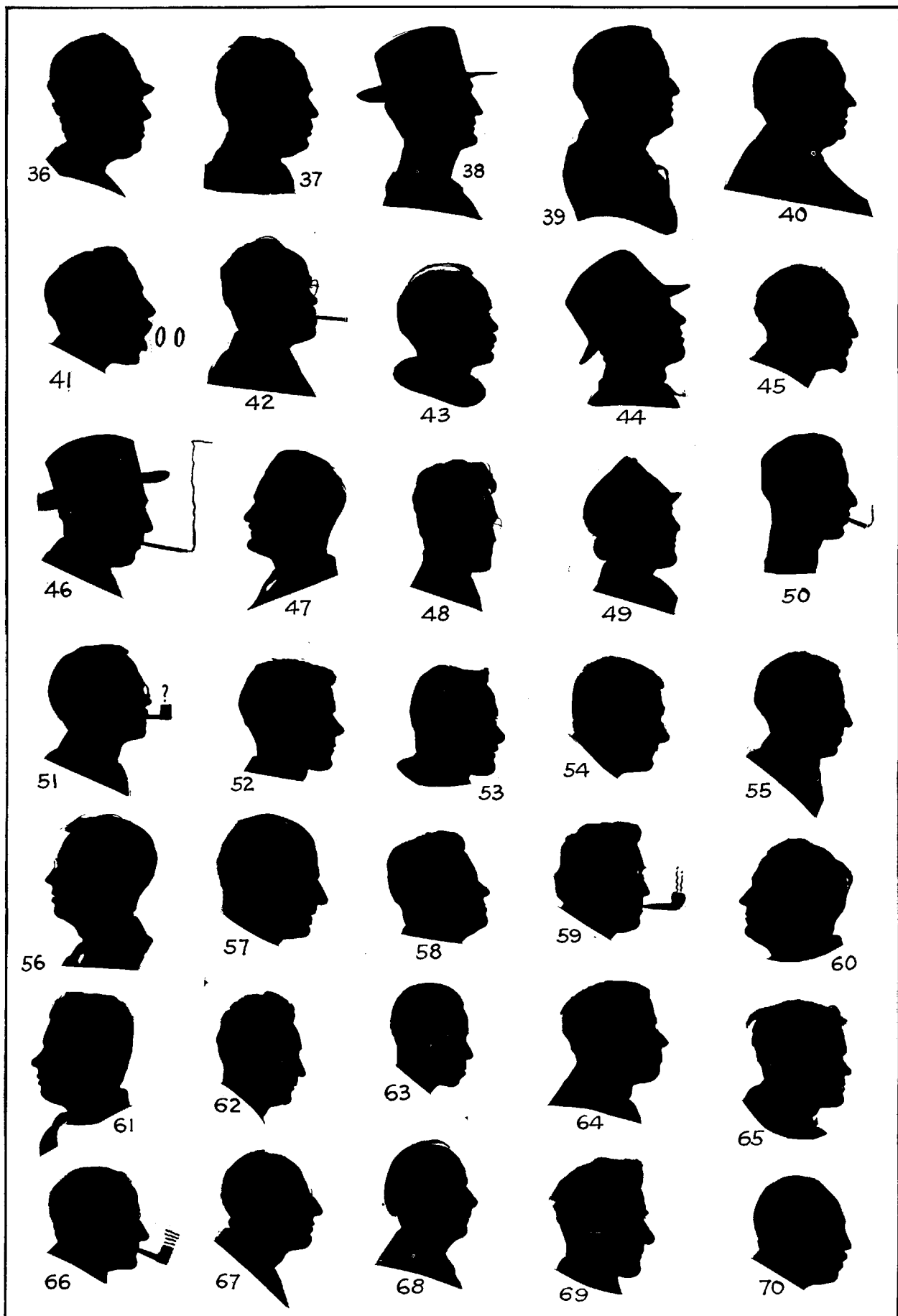
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APRIL, 1928

## SILHOUETTES

By RALPH FANNING, *Professor of Fine Arts*

At an age before photography, silhouette drawing, that is the tracing of the outline of a person or of a cast shadow, might easily have a great vogue. It is simple, and the results are often pleasing for the labor expended. The art had its beginning in antiquity, but the name is comparatively recent.

In the early years of the 18th century, there was born in the city of Limoges, France, one Etienne de Silhouette. While still a young man he gained considerable reputation as a traveler and a scholar. He published historical writings and translations from the English, especially material relative to the financial system of England. As secretary to the Duke of Orleans, he mixed in political affairs. In 1759, largely through the influence of the Marquess de Pompadour, he was made controller general of France.

The French court for a time placed great confidence in the ability of M. de Silhouette to manage the ever complicated financial affairs that were as usual under the Bourbons as they have been at later dates. When he began to be too insistent that the national coffers must needs be filled by land-tax on the estates of nobles and kept filled by the reduction of pensions, popular sentiment, which was then formed by the landed nobility and attaches at court, quickly decided that he was not a financier.

Like other more recent controller-generals de Silhouette seems to have gone from one financial embarrassment to another, and quickly his popularity ceased. He became the butt of the wit and sarcasm of all the wagging tongues of Versailles and never have French tongues wagged more industriously than in the indolent court of Louis XV. Jokes and cartoons of all kinds were directed against the unfortunate minister.

As a last solution of embarrassing money matters, de Silhouette hit upon the happy scheme of having the nobles offer up their silver plate to be converted into coin of the realm. The fastidious nobility didn't favor the suggestion and the word "silhouette" became a popular slang expression for anything reduced to its simplest terms. Numerous "silhouettes" appeared, first of Etienne, the father of the name, but later of all the prominent people.

Poor old Etienne de Silhouette was at last ridiculed out of the ministry and sought solace in religious devotion in some little Marne town where he was soon forgotten, but his name became a common noun admitted to the dictionary by the French Academy in 1835.

Silhouette pictures continued their popularity. During the years of Louis XVI and Marie An-

#### RULES OF THE CONTEST

1. This contest is open to all undergraduate students in the Ohio State University, except assistants in the Departments and members of the Ohio State Engineer staff.
2. Answers must be submitted on the printed forms as found in the Ohio State Engineer. Every contestant may submit as many complete sets of answers as he wishes, each set to be in a separate envelope. No one person shall be eligible for more than one prize.
3. Answers must be filed before four (4) P. M., Friday, May 11, 1928, in sealed envelopes marked "Silhouette Contest, College of Engineering, Lord Hall."
4. Names and departments must be given exactly as printed on the official list.
5. In case of a tie neatness will be taken into consideration in determining the winner.
6. The decision of the judges shall be final.

toinette, as later under the Napoleonic regime when there were frequent returns to classic taste in decoration, the simplicity of silhouettes seems to have been harmonious with classical lines. Greek black and red figured vases and Pompeian fragments of classical painting gave beautiful precedent to justify the continued use of this simple form of decorative illustration.